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ELECTIONS IN THE SOUTH.

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S P E E C H

OF

HON. C. L. BARTLETT,  
OF GEORGIA,

IN THE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1900.

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WASHINGTON.

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The House being in Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union, and having under consideration the Indian appropriation bill—

Mr. BARTLETT said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: I undertook the day before yesterday to get an opportunity to answer some remarks of the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. LINNEY] with reference to my own State, and I intended on yesterday to do so, but I was not able to be present.

Mr. Chairman, the gentleman from North Carolina has so established himself as the harlequin of this House that it is not necessary for me, where he is known or where his peculiar characteristics are known, to refute any suggestion he might make with reference to my own Sta'e. The other States that he arraigned as guilty of gross violations of the law because of election methods and election laws that exist there may take care of themselves, and are able to do so. His own State, which he maligns on the floor of this House, is ably represented and can take care of herself. The State of Mississippi has already taken care of the assaults made upon it, and the gentleman has been answered most fully.

But, Mr. Chairman, when the gentleman undertakes to call attention here to the fact that there have been unfortunate violations of the law in my own State, and undertakes to give as the reason for them that it is because of what he denounces as wrongful and outrageous election laws and election methods existing in Georgia, the gentleman, as usual, speaks without knowledge of the facts and makes statements that the facts do not warrant or bear out.

Now as to the law of Georgia, Mr. Chairman. Since Georgia got control of her own affairs in 1872, when a governor guilty of wrong and fraud upon the State fled between two suns and turned the government of the State over to her own people and to her own sons, no man has been able to truly charge upon her people a

law which was wrong as to elections or to charge us with fraud at the ballot box. I challenge the gentleman from North Carolina in this House, since he has been a member, to point to a case that is sustained by the least proof or a particle of evidence that will refute what I have stated.

The gentleman who charges Georgia with being guilty of violations of law and who attributes the small vote cast in the last election to vicious election laws, which he denounces now as a member of this House, was a member of Elections Committee No. 1, which heard two cases of a contested election from the State of Georgia in the Fifty-fourth Congress. He heard the evidence and he heard the arguments; and after hearing it all he, partisan as he is, giving the utmost weight to every suggestion, to every suspicion, and to every indication that might point to fraud or wrong in elections, in order to turn Democratic members out of the House, with reason if he could, and without reason if he must, knew at the time that he made the statement with reference to the laws of Georgia that both of these cases had been heard in the committee room and that he signed his name to both reports, in which he concurred with every other member of that committee and declared that there was no suspicion of fraud in either.

And with this knowledge, Mr. Chairman, he had the effrontery to disregard the truth and make a statement that assaulted the election laws of Georgia and attempted to allege that unfortunate circumstances and crime that existed there in the past year—that lynchings that have unfortunately occurred, and not only have occurred in Georgia, but everywhere in the United States from New York to California, wherever the cause has existed—I say, when he made that statement, he knew the facts did not authorize him or sustain him in the allegation.

Mr. Chairman, no one knows better than the gentleman who now occupies the chair that these allegations are unfounded, because he was a member of the committee that investigated these cases, and as a fair and honest man, together with every other member of that committee, knows that the election laws of Georgia were fair and honest and that any complaints made against them for twenty years past were unfounded.

Mr. Chairman, we have a constitutional provision which pro-

vides the qualifications for voters, one of which provides that there shall be paid a capitation tax in order to qualify people to vote. Are we peculiar in that? I hold in my hand the law of Rhode Island, which not only imposes the tax, but makes it a crime not to pay it; and the supreme court of Rhode Island, no longer ago than November 27, 1899, declared to the legislature, when inquired about it, if such a law as that were constitutional, that it not only did not violate the Constitution of the United States, but it did not violate the constitution of Rhode Island. So the poor white voter in Rhode Island must not only pay his poll tax in order to vote; but if he does not pay it, he must go to jail. And yet the gentleman from North Carolina, with his great wisdom, with his great knowledge that he parades before the House, arraigns the State of Georgia and other States in this Union that lie south of the Potomac River for fraudulent election laws and fraudulent ballot-box methods.

Lawyer that he is, the walking encyclopedia that he claims to be, this Solomon that half knows everything, Mr. Chairman, did not call attention to a single election law or to a single case except in his own State. This apostate to the teaching and doctrines of his own people was satisfied, in order to accomplish his own purpose of reelection, or hope of election, not only to denounce his own people, but to denounce every other State of the South.

Why, Mr. Chairman, your own State is the advance agent in the laws that protect the ballot box and the intelligent people in the right to cast the ballot.

She set the first example in her Australian ballot law. She has required an educational qualification. So does Connecticut and various other States. Georgia has not yet advanced that far. She may or may not do so. But I tell you, sir, that when it comes to the laws of election and the holding of elections, the election laws of Georgia are just as fair and the holding and certification of the results just as true and honest as in the State of Massachusetts, whose honesty in respect to matters of election has not been questioned. Sir, I do not desire to criticise any one harshly, but they are in the State of Pennsylvania engaged in trying a few ballot-box stuffers, many others having fled the realm in order to escape punishment.

Now, Mr. Chairman, let me tell you what happened in Georgia on the 22d of December, 1899. There were but two Republican members in the house out of 175. With those exceptions, every man was a Democrat; and every man was a white man. Every man owed his place in that house to the nomination and the votes of the white Democracy of Georgia. No, sir, not altogether; for there were some in that house who owed their election as nominees of the Democratic party to the votes of colored people, who voted for them in preference to the Populist candidate.

There was introduced in that house a constitutional amendment copied after the provision of Louisiana and North Carolina. That proposition was fully debated; and on the roll call (two-thirds being required in order to pass it) there appeared in the house of representatives of the State of Georgia only three men voting to put upon the statute books of the State of Georgia a provision which would disfranchise the negro. That is public history. And on that day ministers of the gospel and other representative negroes in the city of Atlanta met together and offered up thanks to God for the action which their old masters and the sons of their old masters had taken. "We owe it," they said, "to them and to nobody else that the right of the ballot which was given to us by the Constitution of the United States has not been taken away."

Mr. LACEY. Will the gentleman allow me a suggestion?

Mr. BARTLETT. Oh, yes; I am always glad to yield to the gentleman.

Mr. LACEY. I am very much gratified to learn of the action of the State of Georgia to which the gentleman from Georgia refers. Now, does he not believe that if North Carolina, Mississippi, and other Southern States would act as generously as Georgia has done there would be less trouble in those States?

Mr. BARTLETT. Why not apply the question to Massachusetts or Connecticut or Pennsylvania?

Mr. LACEY. It is not a negro question there.

Mr. BARTLETT. Ah, my friend, these various gentlemen must take care of their own States. For myself, Mr. Chairman, I want to say that in the State of Georgia we have got along with a ballot law which works no injustice to anybody. Those who pay the poll tax have the right to vote. And in the battles be-

tween the Populists and the Democrats in our State one-half of our colored voters have aligned themselves with the Democrats.

Yet the gentleman from North Carolina, with this fact of public history before him—it having been published in the newspapers of every metropolitan city in the country with conspicuous headlines that Georgia had refused to disfranchise the negro—stands on the floor of this House and denounces us as violators of the law, because, forsooth, we have, as he says, outrageous election laws.

Now, I want to call the attention of this House to an incident which happened about three years ago. The governor of Georgia was stricken and was thought to be dying. His friends stood around watching with anxious hearts to determine whether he would live or die. He was carried from the executive mansion on a stretcher to a room where a surgical operation was to be performed upon him. His wife and children had bid him good-bye. The physicians held out no hope of his recovery. The great cold waters of the sea of eternity were splashing at his feet. He could almost hear the opening of the great beyond. His surgeons laid him bare upon the table; the surgeon's knife glistened before the sufferer's eye. But at that moment he remembered that in the executive office there lay an application for the reprieve or pardon of a humble negro—a person poor and friendless—so much so that the court was obliged to appoint a lawyer to defend him. While lying there on the surgeon's table the governor called out to his secretary, "Do not forget that negro" (naming him), and he named then a period of reprieve for that old negro; and when God had spared his life that reprieve went into effect, and the sentence of the negro was commuted to a life penalty instead of death. [Applause.]

When that man was nominated again by the Democratic party, and was assailed by men who had formerly been Democrats when the banner of the Democratic party was in his hands, thereto marched to the polls all over that State men whose skins were black, led by men who went to the Republican convention for the last five to ten years to nominate a Republican candidate for President, men who were the trusted political friends of President McKinley, white and black in Georgia, and cast their bal-

lots for the candidate of the Democratic party, because, Mr. Chairman, when it came to administering the law and meting out justice, the black man, without friend or help, received at the hands of the governor of Georgia consideration equal to that of any other man in the State. [Applause on the Democratic side.]

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman from Georgia has expired.

Mr. BARTLETT. I hope I may have ten minutes more. I beg the indulgence of the committee.

Mr. GROSVENOR. I ask unanimous consent that the gentleman may have ten minutes.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Ohio [Mr. GROSVENOR] asks unanimous consent that the gentleman from Georgia may proceed for ten minutes. Is there objection?

There was no objection.

Mr. BARTLETT. I thank the House and I thank my friend from Ohio.

Mr. GROSVENOR. If the gentleman will allow me, and it is not an interruption, I should like to say that this is a very interesting subject to me.

Mr. BARTLETT. Yes.

Mr. GROSVENOR. I confess that I have been in the line of thought with the gentleman, and that Georgia has done wonders for the probable checking of wrong upon this question. Now, if it is consonant with the gentleman's ideas, will he explain why so small a vote is cast in Georgia?

Mr. BARTLETT. I thank the gentleman for the suggestion. That was the purpose of my addressing the House. The gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. LINNEY] undertook to give it as irrefutable evidence that the vote in Georgia was suppressed, and that our infamous election law, as he calls it, made the vote small, and that, therefore, people being roused to indignation because they could not vote, committed crimes, or people who could vote committed inexcusable and unnamable crimes, as he charged, upon people who could not vote. Gentlemen, I will tell you the reason for the small vote.

I had the honor of aiding in enacting as a statute of Georgia what is known as the primary election law of that State, by which

the different parties hold primaries to nominate candidates. Every man of Georgia upon the floor of this House and every man who holds an office in Georgia by the election of the Democratic party does not receive that office as the nominee of any clique or county convention or court-house call. He receives that office as the choice of the majority of the Democratic party in its Democratic primaries, and every election held under the primary law is guarded by men who have to be appointed, and sworn, and it is made as much a crime to vote twice or to vote illegally or doing any wrongful act at a primary election in Georgia as to do the same thing at the subsequent regular election.

Now, we have these primaries all over the State of Georgia to choose candidates from governor and Congressman down to justices of the peace and bailiffs, and the contest is in the Democratic party between the candidates for office, who go out amongst the people, discuss the questions involved, and the voters come out in the primary election and cast their ballots; and when the nominations are declared and the elections come in October or November, in an off year or a Presidential year, if you please, the people being satisfied, there being no opposition in nine cases out of ten in the counties or in the Congressional districts of the State, in those districts where there is no opposition the people do not get out to vote.

Pardon me for referring to my own case. Mr. Chairman, in 1894 I was nominated by my people in the various primaries in my district. Nearly every vote was polled, there being three candidates for the nomination. Each one of the three got out his friends, and the ballot was full, honest, and square.

Mr. LACEY. I should like to ask my friend one further question. How extensive was the colored vote in that primary?

Mr. BARTLETT. Well, I will answer that question, speaking only for my own district. I could name the counties. In two counties in my district colored men who acknowledged that they were Democrats, or wanted to vote in the Democratic primary, and thereby declared their allegiance to the party and to support its nominees, did vote and were allowed to vote; and those we knew to be Democratic colored men, who not only supported us in the primary, but when the election came in 1894 and 1896,

with nobody but the Populist candidate running against us, they voted for me as the Democratic nominee. And I have a letter which I wish I had here, that I could read, from one of the white Republicans, amongst many in my district. He not only supported me, but wrote to every county, and, though his business was a hundred miles away from the place where he was to vote, on the election day he left his business and came back to the polling place, and said to me, as he walked to the polls, "I am here to vote for you, as I promised."

So, Mr. Chairman, when the elections came in my own district, the first time, having nobody but the Populist candidate against me, the negroes did not vote, or the vote was divided. The next time we had again the Populist candidate, a man who went out amongst the negroes and undertook to array them against the whites; but the representative colored men in my district, through their executive committee, through the men who go to the national conventions, stumped that district for me with their colored friends and colored supporters and they voted for me. When 1898 came I did not have any opposition, either in my own party, the Populist party, or the Republican party, and every vote in that district that was cast, amounting to but about 3,500, it is true, was cast for me except three. So I give my own case as an answer to the gentleman's question.

My people have honored me by giving me every office I have asked for since the day I was 24 years old. I have never sought anything at their hands without receiving it, and sometimes they have been generous enough to force upon me offices that I did not seek.

They have honored me by giving me every office that I have applied for and some that I did not.

I know the importance of a full vote. My own county possesses a Democratic white registered vote of 4,500. I sat down and wrote to every registered Democratic voter on that list and begged him to come out and cast his ballot, stating to him that the smallness of our vote was a matter of criticism by the opposition. I sent a printed appeal with a ticket with my name upon it, begging them to come out and vote. Out of a registered Democratic vote of 4,500 I received 1,000 votes. One thousand men only went

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to the polls, not because they objected to me, but when I met them on the street and asked "Why did not you vote?" the reply always was: "You have no opposition, and it is not necessary for me to vote."

When I did have opposition, Mr. Chairman, they closed their stores, they shut up their houses, they quit their business, and not a man went back until he had cast his ballot. When I did not have any opposition I could not by the most earnest appeals induce them to come out and vote. The reason the small vote is cast is because a nomination by a white Democratic primary settles the election in every district almost, and opposition has not existed except in rare instances by the Republicans and in some instances by the Populists, and wherever there is opposition by the Populists one-half of the negroes vote with the white Democrats.

Mr. GROSVENOR. That, I suppose, would show that the colored vote is getting to be quite intelligent.

Mr. BARTLETT. Wait a minute.

Mr. GRIGGS. We educate them.

Mr. BARTLETT. Here is something by the smartest and most intelligent negro I know. Here is a statement by Booker Washington about the negro, and here is what he says about the governor of North Carolina. Let us see what he says:

Is there any reason why the negro in the South should oppose the Southern man in politics? Unconsciously we seem to have gotten the idea into our blood and bones that we are only acting in a manly way when we oppose Southern white men with our votes. \* \* \* In some way, by some method, we must bring the race to the point where it will cease to feel that the only way for it to succeed is to oppose everything suggested or put forth by the Southern white men. \* \* \* I believe there are thousands of white Democrats in North Carolina who are 50 per cent better friends to the negro than Governor Russell, and I see no necessity in continuing to follow Governor Russell, who has no power to protect, or if he has the power, does not exercise it, rather than these other white men who can protect us if we cease to continually and forever oppose them.

[Applause.]

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BARTLETT. May I trespass a little more on the time of the committee?

Mr. LITTLE. I hope that the gentleman may be allowed to proceed ten minutes longer.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Arkansas asks unanimous consent that the time of the gentleman from Georgia be ex-

tended ten minutes. Is there objection? [After a pause.] The Chair hears none.

Mr. BARTLETT. What I have said has been with reference to my own district. I prefer rather to speak of it than those of my colleagues, but it is the same with their districts as it was with mine. In the primary that we had, where there were candidates for all the county offices, I had 12,700 votes cast for me, and that was because there were candidates running for every office.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. Will the gentleman yield to me for a question?

Mr. BARTLETT. Certainly.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. What was the population of your district?

Mr. BARTLETT. One hundred and sixty-five thousand, I think.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. Counting 1 vote to 5 of a family, there were 33,180 voters.

Mr. BARTLETT. And 26,000 registered.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. You received 3,008 votes.

Mr. BARTLETT. Yes, sir.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. And there were three against you?

Mr. BARTLETT. Yes, sir.

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. Do you know who they were?  
[Laughter.]

Mr. BARTLETT. Yes. They were Prohibition Populists, extreme upon the subject of the sale of liquor and equally extreme on the subject of Populism in the South. [Laughter.]

Mr. HENRY C. SMITH. And they are against you because you are not a Prohibitionist. [Renewed laughter.]

Mr. BARTLETT. Now, Mr. Chairman, permit me to say in answer to some of these things that have been said with reference to lynchings in the South and in Georgia, I shall not refer to the conditions generally. I have taken pains to investigate the matter, and I do not want to offend anybody; I do not want to be understood as criticising other States. God knows that I would repeat every day that grand prayer that we repeat from the prayer book every Sunday when we go to church: "From all envy and hatred and malice, good Lord deliver us;" and I would commend

it to the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. LINNEY], if he ever has an opportunity to enter the portals of a church, to ask forgiveness for the wrong he has done his own country. [Applause.]

Now, Mr. Chairman, here we are. In my own town of 40,000 people there was a case where a poor, helpless white woman had been assaulted, not by a negro, but by a white man. He was arrested and put in jail, and in that community a public meeting was held, and nobody could stem their indignation; they broke the jail open and carried him out and lynched him. He was a white man. They might have done that thing, and doubtless would have done it, if his skin had been black. Lynchings not only occur in the South, but in the West, in the North, in New Jersey, in New York, in Pennsylvania, in Ohio, in Michigan, and in many other States.

I have here gathered accounts of lynchings that have occurred in all these States; and whether it occurred in the cold climate of New York or Maine, or whether in the cold climate of Minnesota or Michigan, whether it occurred in that State from which the Presidents have come of late—the State of Ohio—one touch of humanity makes all white men kin. [Applause.] No State or community is free from lynchings or mob violence when the honor of their homes and the virtue of their wives and daughters are assaulted. Their homes, their daughters and wives, the neighbors' daughters and wives and their virtue are to be sacred and not to be subjected to criticism because you can not find a cold law that will bridle and check the hot temper of fathers and brothers, whether they live in Ohio or live in Georgia.

Another instance which occurred since this Congress has been in session. A white lady on her way home was waylaid by a colored brute. We do not know whether he committed any wrong or outrage except murder. Her throat was cut, her head beaten into a jelly, and she was thrown into the river, where her body lay until, in the course of nature, decay made it float to the top. They found the murderer; they traced it to him; they put him in jail in that county, the principal county in the district I have the honor to represent, and in a city in the State of Georgia tried him on the 19th day of December by a white jury. He was defended by my own law partner, appointed by the court, for the

man did not have a dollar in the world—defended ably too, so much so as to evoke for the attorneys the thanks of the court and of the law-abiding people; and to-day his case is in the Supreme Court, where they are exhausting every remedy in his behalf.

I give you the two cases, one where a white fiend outraged a white woman and was lynched by my people, in violation of law, if you please, and a negro brute who murdered a white woman ten years afterwards, and was tried and convicted by law. I ask gentlemen on that side of the House to listen not with censure; we ask your sympathy. We know if you had these things existing in your community you would need curs; and you would get it, and not the carping criticism that we received at the hands of the gentleman from North Carolina [Mr. LINNEY]. [Applause.]

Now, Mr. Chairman, I have a number of instances of lynchings in States other than the South which I will not quote, because it will do no good or serve no good purpose; but I want to say this: The South has had great trials and tribulations. We helped found, organize, and build up this great country. Our people in every war from the Revolution down have sought with arms, with their treasure, and her sons to uphold the liberty of our people and the banner of our country. It has been declared by the President of the United States, himself a Federal soldier, that the time had come when these animosities, thank God, should be banished forever in the graves of our soldiers who fought together at San Juan and various places where we battled with the foreign foe. But, Mr. Speaker, if all this does not prove to you, if what our representative men state and the facts do not bear out what I have said, if this does not convince you that we are determined to solve this terrible problem which is put upon us in God's own time to suit our judgment, our duty to God and man and our families and to this great Government, we can not help it.

To those who extend to us the sympathy, forbearance, and patience that we may be entitled to by reason of the condition of affairs that places upon us these great problems for our solution, we thank you. To those who believe what the gentleman from North Carolina has said, that we are vicious violators of the law, that we maintain our supremacy of law and order by vicious election methods and by violation of the law, we have to say we leave

you, we leave him, to the calm indifference of our contempt. [Applause.]

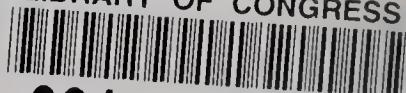
Mr. LINNEY. Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the gentleman a question.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman from Georgia has but one minute left.

Mr. LINNEY. I was not present during his criticisms of me, and I want to ask him a question. Will he tell the House why it is that in the State of Texas, a Southern State, where there are probably as many negroes as there are in Georgia, that there are no lynchings, and about 95 per cent of the electors in that State cast their vote every year, when so few cast votes in Georgia? Now, I want that as a matter of information, without getting mad. [Laughter.] Do not get mad as you do in election precincts, but state it philosophically.

Mr. BARTLETT. Oh, the gentleman from North Carolina is putting on the cap and bells again to play before the House. I have here a list of the lynchings in Georgia and Texas. In Georgia there are 11, and Texas has 7.

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